

Sermon *Have Love Among Each Other*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 5.18.25

Today's Gospel is a part of the "farewell discourse" captured in John's Gospel. Our passage today highlights a new commandment – *Love one another*. I bring some questions to this text, primarily, what does John (and Jesus) mean by "love" and who is the "other".

John wrote this Gospel in Greek. He is Jewish and (presumably) has a Hebrew understanding of faith and tradition. The prayer recited many times during the day for a Jewish person in the 1st Century is called the Shema – (briefly summarized) *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, our Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your being. Love your neighbor. Follow the Lord's commandments*. I think John knew and recited this prayer.

When asked about what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied: *love God with all your being (strength, mind, heart, soul) and the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself*. It can be believed, then, that this two-fold commandment was front and center for the disciples.

Jesus said at the Last Supper: *I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you. This way others will know that you belong to me by the way that you love one another*.

A close translation of Greek to English read this way: *starting today, constantly have self-sacrificial love among and for one another*. You now see why English translations go with the easier phrase – love one another. But, to draw meaning out for us, I prefer the longer translation. What does it mean for us?

I was sent a cartoon strip of two cartoon characters. It was one side of an argument so the reader cannot know the context for the argument (which turned insulting and ugly). The last frame has a character the one who was involved in the argument this question: what is the argument about? The main character says: That guy took my parking spot at church. I think that is the opposite of what Jesus was talking about, yet churches can provide for very loud arguments. Jesus knows this which is probably why he commands: *constantly have self-sacrificial love among and for one another*. He knows we will get into arguments. Sometimes the arguments are about the color of the carpet, or parking spaces, or hymns. It happens. Thus, our command is to love one another. And the world will know us by our love for one another.

In my previous diocese, I was asked to facilitate a meeting with some leaders of a church that had a large Outreach committee serving the homeless people in their area. In the meeting, they were asked this question: is it more important to love the people living on the street who need assistance or is it more important to love the congregants in this room. The response was it is more important to love those who are living on the streets. I read Jesus's new command to mean that it is more important to have love among ourselves. Once we have love among each other, we then reach out in love to those who need help.

The church leaders were frustrated that the more people they helped on the street, the fewer people would be in church. It was pointed out to them that they have a hard time sitting in the same room together as church leaders. Perhaps visitors get a sense of that tension in the congregation and that is why they don't stick around. They worked on communicating between the outreach committee and church leaders so that they would have love among one another.

Jesus said that everyone will know his followers by the way that they have love among one another. People can see that the Church cares for the homeless by the way that they are taken care of; but we are people who are known by our love for those among ourselves.

This past week, I bought a gardening tool that has dramatically changed the way I pull weeds. It's a type of hoe that has a blade that when pulled it goes an inch underground. The blade pulls the weeds easily. I have a lot of white landscaping gravel. Weeds still grow in it. Using this weeder, I pull it and viola the weeds get uprooted. It has really helped speed the process up, I am less grouchier about doing it, and it works great.

I brought up the weeding tool because it is a metaphor. I could take the new weeder and weed my neighbors' homes. But, the point of doing the job quickly is that I can spend more down time with my wife. If I spent all Saturday pulling other weeds, I would have no time left for my family. I read Jesus's new commandment to mean that we are to have love among one another (in this case, my family) and then to reach out to help others. In families, they say that love is spelled T I M E. The weeding tool helps me to have more time (and higher quality time) with my family. That love spreads to the congregation and then to our community.

Although it is strange that we are reminded by Jesus's new commandment to have love among ourselves. It seems like that would be a given. But, life shows that it is not. Church history shows also it is not a given. Let us then take today as a reminder; Jesus commands us to have love among one another and that the world will know us by how we love one another.